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INTERNATIONAL ACCOUNTING AND BUSINESS CONFERENCE 2015, IABC 2015

## Motivation and Willingness to Participate in Knowledge Sharing Activities Among Academics in a Public University

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### Abstract

Individual knowledge is not necessarily easy to be accessed. In some situation individual may prefer to hoard his/her knowledge till there is a motivational factor that promote or influence his/her knowledge sharing intention. In the university, knowledge is intensively created and disseminated through research and publication. Academicians will play their roles as knowledge provider and then transfer and share their knowledge via teaching, presentation at seminar and conferences and through continuous research programs. In common, it is believed that people within this institution would adopt a proactive approach to the development and sharing their knowledge. However, evidence suggests that this is not every time and everywhere case. As Donate and Canales (2012) suggest that the approaches adopted by the universities could be perhaps quite passive, limited and inconsistent. This study is conducted to study motivation and willingness of academics in participating themselves in knowledge sharing activities. This study is conducted among the academicians in a public university. The study used a qualitative method where lecturers were interviewed to understand their approaches and type of motivation that influences their involvement in KS activities.

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Peer-review under responsibility of Universiti Teknologi MARA Johor

**Keywords:** Knowledge Sharing; Academician; Qualitative study; Public University

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## 1. Introduction

In this era of information, knowledge sharing has become a vital activity. The advent of technology and easy access to free information, make every organizations to be weary of the importance of managing knowledge among employees in their organizations. It is the time now that every employee must try to master his/her works so that when he/she becomes the senior or supervisor, he/she can transfer the duties and responsibilities to the subordinates or the next batch of employees. The senior employee must guide the new batch of workers to do the right thing inside the business facility.

### 1.1 Why People Share their Knowledge?

The question of why people need to share and what actually motivate them to share, is mostly supported by linking to few theories that support Knowledge Sharing. According to Islam teaching, the religion of Islam already came to us well over 1400 years ago. From the beginning of the teaching, people are encouraged and being emphasized on seeking and acquiring knowledge. As stated in the teaching, the first words of revelation were “Read!, Recite in the *name of your Lord who created.*” [Holy Qur'an, 96:1]<sup>†</sup>. From this verse, all Muslim shall know and understand that it is an obligation for each of us to seek knowledge. The Prophet Muhammad (pbuh)<sup>‡</sup> also has said;” *The quest for knowledge is a compulsion on every Muslim*” [Hadith Hassan]

Further, as Muslims, our responsibility does not stop there, after we have seek knowledge we are then responsible to disseminate so that it can bring good to others. As our Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) had taught us “*convey for me (to the people) even (if) it be a single ayat*” (Hadith). This works the same way teaching does: when a new teacher begins to teach, that person (i.e., the teacher) learnt for himself first and then he will put his effort towards teaching the knowledge to others. He also acknowledges that this process shall be a continuous process where he shall not stop from learning new things so he becomes more knowledgeable and the more he learned the more he shall teach. Further, we can see there are a number of studies performed on knowledge sharing. A study by Dyer and Nobeoka (2000) indicated that knowledge sharing helps communities of people work together, facilitate the exchange of knowledge, enhance organizational learning capacity and increase the ability to achieve individual as well as organizational goal. Earlier researcher also noted that any organization can support the development and enhancement of KS culture not only by incorporating it within the organizational strategy, but also by changing the attitude and behavior of employees so that they would be willing to share their knowledge.

Motivation can be a determinant which may influence the behavior of individual in doing something even in KS behavior (Lin, 2007). Motivation can be classified as internal (intrinsic value) or external (extrinsic value) motivation. Internal motivation represents an internal value of an individual toward the work itself (Deci & Ryan, 1985). External motivation represents an external value that is not directly related to work itself, but is primarily based on personal values and expectations (Deci & Ryan, 1985).

The question of why we need to share and what will be our motivation is supported by the development of few theories which then are categorized under the theories of Knowledge Sharing. According to Islam, all Muslims must be involved in seeking and acquiring knowledge because by doing so you will get rewards. As narrated from The Prophet (pbuh) said:

“When a man dies, all his deeds come to an end except for three – an ongoing charity, beneficial knowledge (that he disseminates to others) and a righteous son who will pray for him.” (Narrated by Muslim, 1631)

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<sup>†</sup> The Quran verses were taken from the reference from the Holy Quran

<sup>‡</sup> Pbih refers to the phrase “*peace be upon him*” that symbolises the honor given to the Prophet Muhammad

In another point of discussion, as stated by Susantri and Wood (2011), based on the working environment, employees can be pushed in order to increase their involvement in knowledge sharing activity, where these employees' attitude and willingness in KS are highly dependent on their assumption or expectation of profit or loss from their contributions (extrinsic value of motivation).

However, according to Riege (2006) in his paper on barriers for knowledge sharing, some people tend to hoard their knowledge and not even giving attention to what they could get from sharing activities. He has pointed some important factors that hinder knowledge sharing. He classified them as individual factors (e.g., lack of trust, fear of loss of power, and lack of social network), organizational factors (e.g., lack of leadership, lack of appropriate reward system, and lack of sharing opportunities), and technological factors (e.g., inappropriate information technology [IT] systems and lack of training).

## 2. Objectives of the Study

Knowledge sharing (KS) is an activity that involves exchange of information or knowledge to help others in related jobs. However, in many cases the process is not as direct and easy flow process as many people assumed. According to Sohail and Daud (2009) who cited that within Higher Learning Institutions which serve as a reservoir of knowledge, the members shall be able to manage, blend and share their knowledge especially when some of them are developed and are receiving funds or grants to continuously research and implement knowledge management. However, being human, employees and staff in higher education institutions have reasons and motivational aspect for their knowledge-sharing willingness and behavior even though most of the time these people are assumed to be willing to share their knowledge and expertise.

This research focuses on the KS process in a public university. Why this organization is chosen? According to Fullwood, Rowley and Delbridge (2012), universities serve as organization that promotes knowledge creation through research and then it is disseminated through publication. They also play a critical role to transfer the knowledge when they do business or communicate with the business players to support innovation as well as supporting learning through teaching and training. However, the researchers indicated that even there is a strong body of research in KS, this issue received limited attention in higher education institution sectors. Thus, this research takes this opportunity to fill the gap in this interest. This research is also aim to examine the issue of motivation and factors that motivate people to share.

## 3. The Concept of Knowledge Sharing (KS)

According to knowledge based view of the firm (Grant1991, 1996; Spender 1996; Teece 2000) knowledge is the foundation of a firm's competitive advantage and ultimately the primary driver of a firm's value. This knowledge however resides within the individuals (Nonaka and Konno 1998) or specifically within the employees who create, archive, share and transfer and apply while carrying their job. Consequently, when there is movement between knowledge or information across individual, the KS will take place.

KS is the process of mutually exchanging knowledge and jointly creating new knowledge, it implies synergistic collaboration of individuals who work toward a common goal (Gagne, 2009). The level of knowledge sharing can be influenced by several elements or factors. According Davenport and Prusak (1998) extensive knowledge sharing within organizations are still guarded by the human tendencies or behavior. As Bock, Zmud and Kim (2005) suggested that attitude and subjective norms can affect the individual intention to share knowledge.

Based on previous empirical research, Gagne (2009) summarized some important factors that influence knowledge sharing, they were classified as individual factors (e.g., lack of trust, fear of loss of power, and lack of social network), organizational factors (e.g., lack of leadership, lack of appropriate reward system, and lack of sharing opportunities), and technological factors (e.g., inappropriate information technology [IT] systems and lack of training).

Many previous studies have used the theory of planned behavior (TPB) to support their research in KS. since knowledge sharing is an intentional behavior, it can be studied using the TPB in which intentions "are assumed to capture the motivational factors that influence a behavior" (Ajzen, 1991, p. 181). Ajzen (1991) assumed that intentions are the motivational factors that influence behavior, thus according to him, the stronger a person's

intention, the higher the likelihood that he or she will perform the behavior. Further, he has stated that there are three factors that influence intentions: (1) attitude (2) social norms, and (3) beliefs about one's control over the behavior. Attitude is the degree to which one evaluates the behavior favorably or unfavorably. Subjective norm is the perceived social pressure to perform or not perform the behavior. Control beliefs are concerned with having the necessary skills, resources, and opportunities to engage in a behavior. They are similar to the concepts of perceived control, or self-efficacy (Bandura, 1982)

In another research, it has shown that type of motivation to engage in a particular action, or people's reasons for engaging in it, also affect the performance (Sheldon & Elliot, 1998). Taking this reason into account, it can be predicted that the willingness of people to engage in the knowledge sharing activities can be influenced by many reasons including the attitude, behavior and social norms. For this reason, the model of knowledge sharing motivation that combines the theory of Self determination (SDT) and TPB was proposed by Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000) which provides a multidimensional framework with two second-order-level types of motivation. Autonomous motivation means engaging in an activity volitionally—for example, pursuing an activity out of interest and because it is enjoyable (intrinsic motivation), and pursuing it because it is personally meaningful and fits one's value system (identified regulation). Controlled motivation means engaging in an activity out of pressure that can come from outside sources, such as promised rewards and threats of punishment (external regulation), or inside sources, such as when one's self esteem is contingent upon successfully completing a task (introjected regulation).

#### 4. Methodology

Previous researches in this topic generally use quantitative methods to study about the factors that influence KS activity. However, this research is conducted by using an in depth interview with selected respondents from a public university in Selangor, Malaysia. According to Lin (2007), several studies have been conducted based on qualitative approaches to understand the motives underlying KS behavior, however, none of these studies has been in educational sectors. The finding will be reported and hopefully due to the depth of information from the respondents, this research can suggest additional or new element to this area of research. Mc Namara (1999) said Interviews are particularly useful for getting the story behind a participant's experiences. The interviewer can pursue in-depth information around the topic. Interviews may be useful as follow-up to certain respondents to questionnaires, e.g., to further investigate their responses (Mc Namara, 1999). Based on this, it is suggested that in exploring the in depth items based on the experience of the respondents whom are the knowledge providers, it is a must for a researcher to study in depth in terms their value and attitude towards KS. Respondents were selected from few different faculties at random, including Professors, Associate Professor, Senior Lecturers and young tutor. All respondents were interviewed face to face, voice recorded and then transcribed for the purpose of coding and analysis, and finally they are used to discuss the findings.

#### 5. Analysis and Discussion of Findings

##### 5.1 Motivation to share

As stated earlier, the objective of this research is to explore the motivational factors that contribute or influence the willingness to participate in the KS activities. Based on the interviews with respondents, researchers have categorised the factors as; Personal factor, Environment factor, leader's support, commitment and participation, and policy/culture.

Environment factor; we have asked questions such as "Is there any formal or informal avenue to promote the KS activities among the lecturer? Are academics in your faculty actively involved in the KS session at the faculty?". Majority of the respondents agreed that there was no informal avenue for KS activities within their faculties. However, the faculty organizes a formal avenue in which senior professors are invited to give a talk or to share about their research and findings, experiences and thought based on their expertise. But, these events are offered only once a while. The respondents also agreed that most academics within their faculties were not actively involved in the KS among each other except for the purpose of conducting research. Many would prefer to share their knowledge at the seminars and conferences either at local or international venues.

Table 1. Profile of respondents

Respondents Code	Status	Faculty/Dept	Years of services at UPM
<b>R1</b>	Senior lecturer	Dept of Economics	12 years
<b>R2</b>	Associate Professor	Dept of Management	10 years
<b>R3</b>	Tutor	Dept of Management	6 years
<b>R4</b>	Senior lecturer	Dept of Economics	10 years
<b>R5</b>	Associate Professor	Dept of Accounting	15 years
<b>R6</b>	Senior lecturer	Dept of Accounting	9 years
<b>R7</b>	Senior lecturer	Faculty of Ecology & Human Science	10 years
<b>R8</b>	Professor	Faculty of Economics & Management	32 years
<b>R9</b>	Professor	Faculty Science	20 years
<b>R10</b>	Professor	Faculty of Computer Science	15 years

As for the Personal factor, a question “What motivate you to participate in the KS activities?” was asked. Based on the findings, it was found that academics are motivated if the activities are related to helping other, improving the relationship with the peers, building networking, as well as contribute to the Key Performance Index of yearly individual assessment. Here, it can be we can conclude that respondents themselves were relating the KS activities with the questions such as; “Will KS help your peer/ colleague solve problem, will the KS enhance your friendship or networking? What reward will I get for participating in KS activities?”

“I share my knowledge because I myself are willing to do it and happy to do it. I like to see people solved their problem from the knowledge that I shared with them.” (R6)

“.....I share because it will contribute to my KPI, building networking and relationship”(R1, R2, R3, R4, R5, R6, R7, R8, R9 and R10)

“If I share I get satisfaction. For me, what is the point of having knowledge but you don’t share..”(R5)

When the researchers asked question with regards to whether, the leader or superior should play more role in promoting KS, most of the academics agreed that leader’s support, leader’s commitment and participation can influence their motivation to share. According to the interviews, majority of the respondents commented that, the leaders should be able to play a role in promoting the culture of KS, but not all leaders used their authority to make the academics actively participate in KS. But some did.

## 5.2 Culture

To study on this factor, question such as “Do you think the culture that we have in the faculty is one of the reason why people share their knowledge and why not?” was asked.

“What happen here, those who are close friends, they share the knowledge more openly and often however when you are not within their groups there will be a gap between you and them”(R2, R3, R4, R5)

“There exist gap and difficulty to approach those senior colleagues” (R2, R3, R4, R5)

### 5.3 Willingness to Share

Overall, it is suggested that being in the education or knowledge based organization, generally academics have no problem in sharing their knowledge. However, the level of the willingness can be different. The research second objective is to identify the willingness to participate and what factors that can promote or inhibit the intention. Based on the interviews, the research has categorized the willingness are prompted in the following situations;

#### i) Share when you are approach or invited to share

“I would say not everybody is willing to share, I think maybe because of time limitation, overload of work, I took example of a Professor, for they are so busy, they don’t really share informal unless you invite them for a formal talk.” (R2)

“I would share with people who are close to me because they are the one whom I can't say 'no'” (R2, R4, R5, R6)

“To me, I would share without hoping anything as long when I share, I feel that person actually kind of appreciate that I’m sharing and to me it’s more than enough. So, I like to share, but the person must also ask, if they don’t ask, I would not know when to share” (R2)

#### ii) Share more when you have closer relationship such as close friend, peer group

“I would share with people who are closer to me more because they are the one whom I can't say 'no'” (R2, R4, R5, R6)

“Between senior and junior there are always a gap but between peers it is different, for example, me and my colleague, we are quite open, we share similar interest thus we are more happy to share because we can always work together for a paper and publication”(R2)

#### iii) Share more when you have confident or you know better knowledge than others

“When anybody approach me for some knowledge, if I know something about it I will share with them but if I am not really confident cause I have not explore or expert to the extend I am satisfied with it, then I will not share.” (R5).

Based on these results, it can concluded that the level of perceiving and implementing knowledge sharing behaviour among academic staff in the university exist but is not openly or strongly practiced. The respondents also agreed that their willingness to share is not related to whether the person who requests the knowledge is in similar religion or race or not. This suggests that there were no discrimination due to this factor, and if there is it may not be significant and will affect their willingness to share.

In achieving the objectives of this research, the researchers also asked question, “Do you become quite selective in your KS activities”, some respondents said yes, because they would feel more comfortable and willing to share with their close friends and colleagues than with the rest or people they hardly know. But some respondents said, as long as they know they knew something, they will be willing to share. Other question that we asked was” Do you think KS should be promoted via formal or informal events”. According to the respondents, the academics need both in order to promote the KS activities.

## 6. Conclusion

The research has found that knowledge sharing behaviour can be influenced by the elements such as personal, environment, technical support, leaders’ commitment and participation and culture can be subjects to influence the behavior whether the academics will be willing to share the knowledge or not. Thus, these variables were used as factors that influence knowledge sharing behavior among academic staff. This results supported by (Nor Asila et al.,

2012) and Randall (1991) who found in their studies that subjective norm is a function of the person's beliefs and is significant to influence behavior and weight by the person's motivation to perform the knowledge sharing activities.

The main contribution of this study firstly to identify the components that influence knowledge sharing behaviour and the result have shown motivation based on personal factor, environmental factor, leader's support and culture will give influence and motivation in explaining knowledge sharing behaviour among academic staff. Secondly, the purpose of this study is to determine factors that promote the willingness to practice knowledge sharing among academic staff and it was found that the behavior to share has to be pushed by a request, or level of relationship between the contributor and the receiver and the confident level of the knowledge contributor towards his/her knowledge. Therefore, we believe that the policy maker and the management should emphasize the growth of knowledge and individuals who are competent and innovated with high moral values to participate actively and more frequently in KS activities to help Malaysia achieve its objective to become a centre of excellence for higher education.

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